

This Week in Congress

March 3, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Troubled by the Air Force's Tanker Announcement

I was greatly disappointed by the U.S. Air Force's decision on Friday to award the contract for the new air refueling tanker to European-owned Airbus over a proposal put forth by American-based Boeing. Especially during this time when we are focusing on stimulating the U.S. economy, it makes no sense to outsource this multi-billion dollar contract to a foreign company instead of creating American jobs. This decision has significant impact not only in Wichita, where Boeing's finishing and test center for tankers would take place, but also on the entire state of Kansas as many local suppliers provide support services and parts for Boeing. I am anxious to hear from the Air Force regarding their justification for this decision.

Plan to Reduce Social Security Backlog Moves Forward

The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced this week that it is hiring two new judges to decide disability claims in Kansas. For the past several years, the number of Kansans waiting for SSA to issue a decision grew to more than 14,000. As the number of cases waiting a judge's review increased, Kansans waited longer and longer for their case to be heard. Many individuals applying for disability benefits are unable to work and are without income during this time. Some Kansans have had to wait for more than a year. This is unacceptable.

I have been working with SSA to make sure they take steps to reduce the backlog and provide Kansans with the timely service they deserve. In a meeting I had with the head of SSA in November, I learned of the organization's plans to bring two new judges to Kansas and to make use of technology to speed up the decision process. I am pleased to see SSA move forward on its plan. The addition of new judges should help reduce the amount of time Kansans have to wait for a decision. I will continue to monitor SSA's progress in eliminating the backlog.

Kansas National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility Task Force Meets

The Kansas National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) Task Force, which includes top Kansas officials from the local, state and federal level, met in Washington, D.C., this week to continue the state's efforts to be selected for the federal biodefense laboratory.

Kansas State University is one of six site finalists for the \$450 million, 500,000 square foot NBAF facility, the mission of which will be to ensure the safety of our nation's food supply. I am pleased to see Kansas' leaders work together in a bipartisan, united way to bring NBAF to Manhattan. NBAF is a great opportunity for our state and I will continue my efforts to see that we are well-positioned when the Department of Homeland Security reaches a site selection decision this fall.

Meeting with World Food Program Director

This week, I met with United Nations World Food Program Executive Director Josette Sheeran to discuss the shortfall in food aid caused by record high grain prices. Kansas farmers are not used to prices this high and neither are aid agencies. The result for farmers is that finally the price they are paid for their crops can cover the cost of growing it. The result for those made homeless by storms and countries experiencing famine could possibly be malnourishment and starvation.

As co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I am committed to creating awareness among Members of Congress that there are many people, at no fault of their own, suffering because they lack this most basic need. As a Congressman from Kansas, I feel responsible to share with you the stories I hear. There is a great need to help hungry people around the world. Many generous Kansans, churches and communities have asked me how they can help. One way is to help "fill a cup" for a child. One quarter will feed a child for a day at a school feeding program. To learn more [click here](#) .

Veterans Committee Examines Mental Health Services for Families

In addition to our service men and women and veterans, family members often bear the emotional costs of war. This week, I attended a Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing that examined the adequacy of Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) mental health care services for family members of veterans. A little over a year ago, legislation I introduced was signed into law that authorizes the VA to hire Marriage and Family Therapists. I am now working with the VA to ensure quick implementation of this law so that veterans and their families have access to this important care.

House Agriculture Committee Outlines Budget Priorities

Each year, committees in the House of Representatives outline budget recommendations for the federal agencies and programs under its jurisdiction and submit it to the House Budget

Committee. The House Budget Committee then crafts the budget for the coming fiscal year. This week, the House Agriculture Committee outlined priorities for agencies and programs under its jurisdiction.

The priority of the Agriculture Committee continues to be the completion of the farm bill. Despite a budget baseline that was \$60 billion less than when the 2002 Farm Bill was written, the House Agriculture Committee passed a new farm bill on July 20, 2007. This year, we continued to push for adequate funding to pass this important bill.

Be Wary of Phone and Internet Scams

A new set of Internet and phone scams have recently begun in light of Americans soon receiving tax rebate checks. Recent reports indicate that scam artists are posing as officials from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or Social Security Administration. Criminals are calling people and requesting personal financial information, such as a bank account number, claiming the agency needs it to deposit the rebate money. Please do not fall for these scams. The IRS will never ask a taxpayer to share sensitive personal or financial information over the phone or Internet. Scam emails and information about scam phone calls should be forwarded to phishin@irs.gov

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Visiting with Lincoln High School Students

Using video conference technology, I visited with Lincoln High School students this week from Washington, D.C. While I make an effort to visit high school classrooms in Kansas each year, this technology allows me to talk to students while Congress is in session. The students and I talked about my job as a Member of Congress and several issues important to them, including ways to improve the economy, health care and the war in Iraq. Thanks to teacher Michael Schrant and his students for the opportunity to visit.

Listening to the Hays High School Chamber Singers at the KMEA Convention

En route home from Washington, D.C., I attended the Kansas Music Educators Association Annual Convention in Wichita where the Hays High School Chamber Singers were performing. The students did a wonderful job under the direction of Elise Peterson. My daughter, Alex, is a member of the Chamber Singers and Robba accompanies the group. While there, I also had the opportunity to visit with many educators from across Kansas. It is important that music and art programs be recognized and not undercut by No Child Left Behind policies.

Learning about Services at Wesley Rehabilitation Medical Center

After attending the Kansas Music Educators Association performance, I visited Wesley Rehabilitation Medical Center in Wichita. CEO Pam Stanberry gave me a tour of the facility where they provide inpatient and outpatient services to Kansans recovering from things such as strokes, accidents and brain injuries. The center features state-of-the-art rehabilitation equipment and services. I appreciate Pam taking time to show me around the facility.

Big First Listening Tour Continues

From Capitol Hill to Bunker Hill, I continued my Listening Tour this week with a stop in Hanston in Hodgeman County. My schedule for this week is as follows:

Monday, March 3

Marion County Tour Stop, Peabody

Time: 1:45-2:45 p.m.

Location: Senior Center, 106 N. Walnut

Chase County Tour Stop, Elmdale

Time: 3:15-4:15 p.m.

Location: United Methodist Church, basement meeting room, 301 Spruce

Friday, March 7

Wabaunsee County Tour Stop, North Wabaunsee County

Time: 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Location: Cottonwood School House, 39966 Hwy 99

Dickinson County Tour Stop, Abilene

Time: 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Location: Rotary Club, Abilene Country Club, 1705 Country Club Lane

[Click here](#) to stay up-to-date on additional stops being scheduled.

In the Office

Warren Hixson of Hutchinson, Shari Wilson of Kansas City and Julie Mulvihill of Topeka were in with the Kansas Humanities Council to update me on cultural programs and events across our state. Troy Schroeder of Wichita was in with the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition to talk about the benefits of the State Wildlife Grants program. Bob Henry of Robinson was in with the American Soybean Association to talk about the organization's priorities for farm policy in the upcoming farm bill conference.

Narcotics Officer Doug Garman of Topeka and Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force Officer Karrina Brasser of Wichita were in with the Kansas Narcotics Officers Association to encourage full funding for the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program. Peter Ninemire of Wichita was in with Families Against Mandatory Minimums to advocate for equitable sentencing and to tell me about drug-rehabilitation programs in Kansas. Tauna Spain and Anthony Pollock of Topeka, Johnny Taylor and Steve Reitan of Manhattan and Rachane Teara of Wichita were in with Flint Hills Job Corps to tell me how students benefit from the job training and mentoring

Job Corps provides.

Gary Gantz of Ness City, Alan Stone of Hillsboro and Tom Tunnell of Topeka were in with the Kansas Grain and Feed Association and Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association to discuss issues impacting the grain and agriculture input sectors in Kansas.

James Morton of Dodge City, Kenny Gorman of Topeka, Rick Moscicki of Wichita and Scott Howard of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Fraternal Order of Police to discuss legislation that would provide collective-bargaining rights to police officers. Coleen Boxberger of Russell and Kristin Anderson of Kansas City were in with the National Court Reporters Association to express their support for legislation that would provide funding to court reporting schools.

Col. Barney King of Salina, Commander of the Kansas Wing of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), was in to discuss CAP activities in Kansas and funding for next year. Representatives from the Kansas Municipal Utilities stopped by to discuss issues impacting rural utilities, including rising energy rates and water quality standards. In with the group were Executive Director Colin Hansen of McPherson, Government Relations Director Brad Mears of Holten, City of Gardner Electric Utilities Director Ken Arnold, City of Lindsborg Administrator Greg DuMars, City of Chanute Director of Electric and Gas Utilities Larry Gates and Harry Zielke of Larned.

Riley Walters of the Butler County Weed Department in El Dorado and Jeff Vogel of the Kansas Department of Agriculture in Topeka were in to discuss issues important to helping control noxious and invasive weeds in Kansas. Bret Healy of Olathe was in with the Kansas Bioscience Authority to discuss opportunities to position Kansas as a leader in emerging biomass and biofuel technologies and production practices.

Greg Shelor of Garnett was in with the National Sorghum Producers to talk about farm bill priorities and the role of sorghum for our nation's energy policy. Mark Lehman of Girard, Bob Mosier of Greensburg, Toyna Bonjorno of Kirwin, Jean Stapel of Phillipsburg and Naomi Childrew of Mound City were in with Resource Conservation and Development to discuss the President's budget and tell me about two national awards received by councils in the State of Kansas. Barth Crouch of Kansas Pheasants Forever/Ducks Unlimited was in to talk about Playa Lakes Joint Venture and conservation practices used in Kansas.

Ben Miller of Hutchinson and Lynne Moss of Pratt were in with the Society of American Florists to discuss how federal immigration and tax policies affect the floral industry. Deans of Kansas engineering schools were in to talk about the need for Congress to invest in math and science education and to explain the importance of funding through the National Science Foundation. In with the group were University of Kansas School of Engineering Dean Stuart Bell of Lawrence, Wichita State University College of Engineering Dean Zulma Toro-Ramos of Wichita and Kansas State University College of Engineering Dean John English of Manhattan.

In from Topeka were Kansas Department of Transportation Secretary Deb Miller and Assistant Director of Planning and Development Dennis Slimmer to discuss funding for highways in Kansas. Shelley Duncan of Wichita was in to update me on the multiple projects going on at the Youthville Dodge City Campus. Fred Lucky of Topeka was in with the Kansas Hospital Association to discuss the impact the proposed Medicare cuts would have on Kansas hospitals.

Lynn Hegvik of Shawnee was in with the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation to discuss creating a Medicare benefit for patients who need Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation. Jolene Niernberger of Hays was in with the National Senior Corps Association to explain the importance of the National and Community Trust Act to Senior Corps programs. Nikki King of Lawrence was in with Health Care Access Clinic to discuss programs the clinic provides.

Alisa Hart, Laura Koziesk and Amy Dublinske of Emporia were in with the National Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance to talk about the need to create awareness and fund research to combat this disease. Jan Long of Salina was in with the Kansas State Parent Teacher Association to discuss the importance of parent involvement in education. Representatives of the Kansas Chiropractic Association were in to provide information about the need for veterans and soldiers to have access to quality chiropractic services. In with the group were Dr. John Nab, Jessica Pecina, Joseph Glenn, Samuel Yoder and Julie Holland of Overland Park; Dr. Gail Boyer of Lenexa; Dr. Kenyon Erickson of Manhattan; Dr. Edward McKenzie of Holton; Dr. Tobi Jeurink of Gardner; Dr. Travis Oller and John Kiefhaber of Topeka; and Michele Goscha of Selden.

Kent Cornish of Topeka, Mark Vail of Hays, Rich Wartell of Manhattan, Mike Fell of Colby, Joan Barnett of Wichita and Joe Jindra of Concordia were in with the Kansas Association of Broadcasters to discuss various issues, including efforts to prepare consumers for the digital television transition and their opposition to a new performance tax on local radio broadcasters. Kenneth Brock and Blake Benson of Pittsburg, Dick Hedges of Fort Scott and Jim AuBuchon of Overland Park were in with the 69 Highway Officials to discuss the need to continue studies to finish the four-lane construction of U.S. Highway 69 from Kansas City to Interstate 44 in Oklahoma. The completion of the approximately 60 miles from Fort Scott to the Oklahoma state line is the group's highest priority.

Greg DuMars was in with the City of Lindsborg to bring me up-to-date on the city's new

wastewater treatment plant. Duane Anstine of Hutchinson was in with the National Retired Teachers Association to discuss the Divided We Fail campaign. Gregg Langton of Manhattan, John Crain of Fort Scott, Sue Peachey of Pratt and Chuck Simpson of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Association of Professional Insurance Agents to talk about crop and natural disaster insurance. Dan Brynn of Colby, Steve Ezell of Pratt, Brady DeVille of Clay Center and Dale Hayse of Mullinville were in with the National Groundwater Association to discuss geothermal heat pump programs and other water related issues. Rod Barnes, Sarah Talley and Mike Rhodes of Junction City also stopped by this week to visit.

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office for a tour of the United States Capitol this week. Bill and Shirley Andrews of Salina came by, as did Kristin and Kate Piper of Lawrence and Michelle Chippeaux-Kammerer of Wichita. In from Conway Springs were Anthony and Candi Morris with their children, Austin, Kaylee, Rianna and Mariah.

Very truly yours,

Jerry